

Balanced Leadership: The Forgotten Art

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to

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Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself.  
When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.

– Jack Welch

Leadership is more art than science. It is dynamic, painful, time consuming... and a priceless gift. The Marine Corps expends considerable time and effort to develop leaders. However, most USMC tents of leadership support either mission accomplishment and/or troop welfare. The challenge of any leader is to balance these two objectives. Unfortunately, as an institution the Marine Corps has failed to emphasize the operative word: balance. The consequence is a core of leaders that struggles with balancing mission accomplishment with troop welfare. As the current operational commitments continue to shift, Marine Corps leaders have lost their perspective of balanced leadership, which if not corrected will degrade the Marine Corps' ability to sustain future operational commitments. The Marine Corps must educate Leaders on the benefits of balancing mission accomplishment with troop welfare.

### Current Situation

War has historically been a catalyst for innovation, while peace has fostered careerism and bureaucracy in the Marine Corps.<sup>1</sup> The battlefield of "the long war" is increasingly dispersed and complex, and making new demands on combat leaders. General C. C. Krulak, 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps has

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<sup>1</sup> Twining, Merrill B. *No bended knee* (novato, ca: presidio press, 1996) 139-146

called upon the fundamentals of Marine leadership to answer contemporary challenges with core values, the fourteen leadership traits, and the eleven leadership principles.

Major General Jones (USMC retired) expressed concern about the motives of the officer corps in the area of personal ambition and leadership. He stated that "Success in the Marine Corps does not equate to the accomplishment of the rank of general officer."<sup>2</sup> The overriding desire for personal promotion in a leader in fact will distract a leader from making objective mission decisions. Leaders are required to make decisions based on the requirements of the mission and to make the best use of the unit's resources. In today's environment leaders must reconcile balanced leadership and the expectation of Marine leaders.

### Leadership: Definitions

The Marine Corps defines leadership as "the sum of those qualities of intellect, human understanding, and moral character that enables a person to inspire and to control a group of people successfully."<sup>3</sup> To help leaders recognize leadership within a unit the Marine Corps outlines four leadership

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<sup>2</sup> Major General Jones, Thomas S., USMC (retired), leadership and family, 23 August 2005, guest lecture

<sup>3</sup> Marine Corps Manual (MCM) CH 1-3, 1980, Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, Washington, D.C. 20380, 1-22

indicators: morale, esprit de corps, discipline and proficiency.<sup>4</sup> However, each must be viewed in the context of balancing mission accomplishment with troop welfare.

Morale is the individual's state of mind. It depends on the Marine's attitude toward everything. World War II wrought a great change in the relations between officers and enlisted men in the military services. A spirit of comradeship and brotherhood in arms developed in the training camps and on the battlefields. This spirit is too fine a thing to be allowed to die. As promoted in the Marine Corps Manual, brotherhood and comradeship must be fostered and kept alive and made the moving force in all Marine Corps organizations.<sup>5</sup> Troop welfare is critical. It is easy to become focused on the current task, but leaders must step back and assess the units' morale. Failing to do this will have an ultimately effect on mission accomplishment and the ultimate test of wills -- the outcome of war.

Esprit de Corps encompasses morale, loyalty to, pride in, and enthusiasm for the unit shown by its members.<sup>6</sup> Whereas, morale refers to the Marine's attitude, esprit de corps is the unit spirit. Leaders must look at the spirit of each Marine and

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<sup>4</sup> Staff Noncommissioned Officers Career Distance Education Program, "Leadership and Administration" Marine Corps Institute; 8108, Study Unit 1, Lesson 1, 1-4

<sup>5</sup> Marine Corps Manual (MCM) CH 1-3, pg 1-22

<sup>6</sup> Marine Corps Institute; 8108, Study Unit 1, Lesson 1, 1-4

assess the comfort, health, military training, and discipline of these Marines under their command. However, leaders also must understand the discipline which Marines must have to serve, and they must make every effort to direct zeal toward mission accomplishment as well.

Discipline is the individual or group attitude that ensures prompt obedience to orders and the initiation of appropriate action in the absence of orders.<sup>7</sup> Trust builds on the relationship between leader and subordinate and should reflect the relationship that exists between parent and child. As leaders train their Marines, a level of discipline must be acknowledged and maintained.

Proficiency is the technical, tactical, and physical ability of the Marine and the unit to perform the assigned mission.<sup>8</sup> According to the Marine Corps Manual "The realization of this responsibility on the part of officers is vital to the well-being of the Marine Corps. It is especially vital because so large a proportion of the men enlisting are under twenty-one years of age. These men are in the formative period of their lives; officers owe it to them, to their parents, and to the nation, that they will be far better men physically, mentally,

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<sup>7</sup> Marine Corps Institute; 8108, Study Unit 1, Lesson 1, 1-4

<sup>8</sup> Marine Corps Institute; 8108, Study Unit 1, Lesson 1, 1-4

and morally when discharged from the services than when they enlisted."<sup>9</sup> Hence, proficiency has "short -term" utility in terms of mission accomplishment and long-term utility for the welfare (career development) of each individual.

### Fundamental Leadership

The Marine Corps has identified (14) leadership traits and (11) leadership principles that apply in both peacetime and combat operations. Leaders must actively induce these traits and apply these principles in daily activities to help Marines earn the respect, confidence, and loyal cooperation of other Marines, which in turn is necessary to accomplish the mission.

### Balanced leadership

The word "balanced" means "to bring into proportion, harmony."<sup>10</sup> Although it is rarely military service associate with the concept of balance, the definition still stands. The dilemma with this term is that it does not account for unknown factors that occur in everyday life. In the chaos of war, balanced leadership is acknowledged for which Marines must be prefaced.

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<sup>9</sup> Marine Corps Manual (MCM) CH 1-3,1-22

<sup>10</sup> Webster's New World College Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "Balanced".



Leadership objectives are introduced during a Marines earliest level of training and are reinforce through continued education. Understanding and implementing balance between these objectives requires the intentional subjugation of the most basic human instincts, self-preservation and ambition.

Marines must be able to trust leaders will "Take care of them." The critical element is trust. This trust is reciprocating as it moves up and down the chain of command.

General George S. Patton, Jr. stated, "Never Tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."<sup>11</sup>

As trust is built, leaders will become valued as stewards of their Marines. In doing so, they will inspire Marines to seek the common good of all above self-interest and to perfect their skills and unit capabilities for combat.<sup>12</sup>

Subordinate leaders can now be trusted to make responsible decisions without the direct influence of the commander (a.k.a. decentralized control), just as the subordinates can trust their unit leader to make unselfish and responsible decisions. When

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<sup>11</sup> Alan Axelrod "Patton on Leadership" Chapter 6, page 165.

<sup>12</sup> Wagner, Daniel R. "Servant Leadership - A Vision for Inspiring the Best from our Marines." Marine Corps Gazette 88, no. 1 (2004): 54.

leaders are able to implement this balance, the Corps will have set successful conditions within the institution.

By exemplifying subordination to mission, the leader challenges subordinates to make responsible decisions with unit assets based on a servant mind set. Leaders must set conditions that allow Marines to function and grow, but even more critical leaders must not put personal promotion and preservation before the welfare of those they lead. Therefore, in order to develop an unselfish leader, the Marine Corps must change the current paradigm of leadership objectives through education.

Leaders achieve greater unit performance because they take an objective view toward organizational success and challenges. These leaders credit unit success to their subordinates and accept responsibility for unit successes or failure.<sup>13</sup> Because leaders are not concerned with personal ego or accolades, they can take a more objective approach to increasing unit performance.

Additionally, an active focus on balancing Marine Corps objectives will facilitate enduring organizational success through mentorship. Leaders dedicate personal time to subordinates to communicate unit vision and provide methodology

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<sup>13</sup> Collins, Jim. Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't, pg 36.

for its execution. By systematically acting in accordance with Marine Corps trait and principles, a leader will close the gap on expectation and will create common ground for communicating with their Marines. Leaders are then able to pass on intent and vision to their subordinates, providing the means for accomplishment of the vision long after they are dead.

### Counter Argument

Senior Marine leaders would argue that mission accomplishment is primary. These leaders, however, fail to realize that the end does not always justify the means. Sun Tzu stated "Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys. Look on them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death!" Conversely, leaders who pursue only troop welfare, not for the mission, are losing perspective. Leadership must promote a responsible attitude of compassion tempered with mission accomplishment

### Conclusion

All leaders are subservient, either to their own selfish ambitions or to the service of their country, Corps and Marines. Current Marine Corps leadership philosophy tends to exclude the latter. Napoleon Bonaparte stated "A leader is a dealer in

hope." As the Marine Corps educates future leaders on balancing mission accomplishment with troop welfare. Leaders will naturally be more effective in his/her communication with Marines and, thereby, find the key to mission accomplishment.

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